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Brand Management:

A Full Time Job *By Karen Compton, CPSM*

The American Marketing Association defines brand as a “name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers.” To create a brand, though, you can’t choose one or the other. Your brand must be a name and at least one distinctive feature: the promise that goes with it. This could be the assurance that a certain orange juice is 100% pure, or that a tennis shoe is made to a certain standard. In short, the brand begins with the mission.

To create a brand, first decide: What is your promise to those who secure your services? In July 2010, I had to answer that question for myself, as

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Your Brand, Your Promise *By Rich Burns*

You’re not alone if you are challenged by managing your firm’s brand. Branding for professional service firms is difficult to achieve, and brand equity is extremely hard to measure. Professionals don’t have products on store shelves, delivery trucks displaying company logos, or extensive advertising campaigns to burn their identity into the consciousness of their audiences. Branding for professional services firms is far more subtle, but no less important.

In the 1990s branding became an obligatory concern of all businesses. Branding stems from the corporate identity programs of the 60s and 70s that focused on the way a company presented itself visually. Philip Kotler, Professor of Marketing at Northwestern University’s Kellogg Graduate School of Management, and widely regarded as one of the preeminent scholars in the field of marketing, defines a brand as, “a name, a term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods, services of one seller or group of sellers and differentiate them from those of competitors.”*

Kotler goes on to explain, “a brand is essentially a seller’s promise to consistently deliver a specific set of features, benefits and services to the buyers.” A brand can convey up to six levels of meaning that Kotler identifies as:

- **Company attributes**
- **Benefits**
- **Values**
- **Culture**
- **Personality**
- **Audience**

Based on this definition, branding transcends the purely visual and embraces a firm’s character and behavior. Professional service firms have struggled in their attempts to codify their brand in ways that embrace behavior in a meaningful way. Does your entire firm understand your brand? Can they easily define and explain it? Do they live it everyday?

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Brand Management: A Full Time Job

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phone calls to our offices kept coming in from clients (current or past) looking for consultants with special skills. They asked for marketing professionals, accountants with experience in the FAR, attorneys with specialties in water intrusion, and more. As if I “had the answers,” they were calling me! While each firm’s need was different, every referral request had one common criterion: “They must know our industry.”

We knew the industry, and we saw an opportunity to meet this demand. With a team of dedicated staff, we designed a searchable database that allows firm owners, small businesses, and emerging practices to find consultant and professional resources that fit their needs. They can read or post reviews of service providers or even recommend one. Today, this database is known as Industry Speaks.™ Our tag line is simple: “Consultants that speak your language.”

Before settling on the concept, we challenged our web designer to build a platform and service that would connect individuals in the design profession to service providers in the business environment. He struggled to frame it. But once we settled on the brand and its mission, “to provide expert, independent consultant resources and reviews that allow design and construction professionals to make informed business decisions that enhance their position in a global marketplace,” his job got easier. Industry Speaks™ seeks to keep its promise of being an independent and trusted source of referrals.

Branding it and designing it were easy. The challenge has been making sure to deliver those industry-specific resources. Our choice of organizational partners, affiliates and consultants has been deliberate and relentless. Our goal has been to reach out to professionals, agencies, and organizations that support the design and construction profession to identify and include a full range of consulting services—accounting, legal, marketing, ownership transition, management and finance—from around the corner and across the country. Whether a firm seeks to expand or contract, acquire or sell, its ownership shouldn’t have to rely on a Tweet® or a social media post to find the right resource.

So, what does this have to do with you and your firm? Simple. Ask yourself: “What is our firm’s brand and what is its brand promise?” In today’s competitive environment, where clients have a choice, state your organization’s promise clearly and position your firm to deliver on it every time you develop new work. ■

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Marketing Tool of the Month When You Need to Change Your Name *By Rich Burns*

In the evolution of a professional practice there are a number of circumstances that will cause a company to consider a new name. Factors that influence the decision to rename a company include a change in ownership, loss or departure of a founder or partner, changes in the legal makeup of the company, and a host of market-driven reasons.

Changing a name is not something to take lightly. There are significant political (internal), psychological, market, and expense issues associated with a name change. There must be a compelling strategic reason to do so. The process of picking a new name requires a combination of research, emotion, creativity, and luck.

Research – Research is necessary to fully assess and understand your brand attributes, culture, values, and meanings that must be captured in the new name. A name change is a perfect opportunity to engage staff and clients in the process through surveys of attitudes and perceptions.

Emotion – Emotion is involved both in selecting a label which evokes the proper combination of meaning, sound, interpretations, and syntax and in addressing the internal and external reactions to a new name.

Creativity – Creativity is required to create or identify the perfect word, abbreviation, contraction, or other vocabulary or grammatical device with which to label the firm.

Luck – Many great names are already taken. You’ll need luck so that your perfect name is available when you go to register it.

Initials and the names of partners or key people are easy fallbacks. If you choose a label other than names or initials, the new name should:

- *Be succinct and simple, yet strong and engaging*
- *Have meaning that is logical, relevant, and reflective of key firm attributes*
- *Express purpose and personality*
- *Reflect the scale of the company and its activities*
- *Be easy to remember*
- *Connect to the firm’s history and legacy*
- *Allow you to tell a good story about the reason for the change*

Since new names are always accompanied by a new graphic look, promotion of the change is a perfect opportunity to reposition the company’s image and tell your story in a whole new light. ■

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